Scenario 1 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

In an undergraduate politics subject, students must create a blog using Blogger.com, and write and publish a blog post of about 500 words each week for eight weeks. The assignment is worth 30% of the subject mark. At the beginning of the assignment students are provided with the assessment criteria and told to note, in particular, the requirement that each blog post is an appropriate length: 500 words. Students are given some freedom with regards to the content of the blog, although they are expected to engage critically with the weekly topic, the tutorial readings, and other resources and media available on the Internet. They are told that they should post a contribution each week.

Scenario:

At the end of semester the lecturers are impressed by the quality of the work students have created in this assignment. Some students have gone over and above what was required and there is evidence that they have really engaged with this assignment and the weekly topics. One student in particular published some excellent blog posts in the early weeks of the assignment – each post was well over 1,000 words, they were well-written, contained sophisticated critical analysis of the weekly topic, and evidence that the student had researched the topic widely.

However, by the end of semester this student had only completed five (high-quality) blog posts. Despite this, lecturers were impressed by the overall quality of the student's work and, as they were assessing the overall body of work on the blogs, they give the student a HD for this assignment.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 1 (Student)

About the assignment:

In an undergraduate politics subject, students must create a blog using Blogger.com, and write and publish a blog post of about 500 words each week for eight weeks. The assignment is worth 30% of the subject mark. At the beginning of the assignment students are provided with the assessment criteria and told to note, in particular, the requirement that each blog post is an appropriate length: 500 words. Students are given some freedom with regards to the content of the blog, although they are expected to engage critically with the weekly topic, the tutorial readings, and other resources and media available on the Internet. They are told that they should post a contribution each week.

Scenario:

After completing her first blog post, Eliza reads some of the other student blogs and is impressed by the amount of work some of the students have put into it. She notes that some of the students' writing is exceptional and feels a bit disheartened, knowing that her work will be assessed alongside these blogs. She also realises that some of the blogs must be much longer than the 500 word length stipulated in the guidelines. She knows that, with her study load, she will not be able to produce blog posts like that every week for eight weeks. She re-reads the assignment guidelines and assessment criteria, and feels reassured about her progress when she reads this: "In writing your blog you should consider the criteria indicated (in particular, that the blog is an appropriate length – 500 words). The focus of your blog is your decision. However you should post a contribution each week."

At the end of semester, Eliza is relieved when she sees that some of the other students have not continued to write such long blog posts. One student, whose blog was particularly good, has not uploaded her final three posts. However, Eliza is disappointed when she hears that this student received a HD for her blog. She feels that even though she followed the guidelines for the assignment, her work could not be marked fairly against the work of other students who went over and above what was required.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 2 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

There are approximately 250 students enrolled in a creative writing course. At the beginning of the semester, students set up a page on a social networking site and use this to publish short assignments for lecturers and other students to see throughout the semester. Students are required to review their peers' work: each week students must comment on three other students' work. 10% of the subject mark is allocated to this peer review process. Students are told at the beginning of the semester what is expected in this peer review: they are given a list of vocabulary that could be used and are told to focus on making their feedback constructive and helpful. Usually the peer review works well but it must be monitored.

Scenario:

Half-way during the semester the lecturer learns that one student has been overly negative in his comments on other students' work. The lecturer decides to address this by reminding students in class about the purpose of the peer review and asking students to see her if they have any concerns about a negative review they've received. In order to protect one student who has received a particularly harsh comment, the lecturer posts a positive comment on the students' site, suggesting that some of the criticisms in the peer review were unwarranted.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 2 (Student)

About the assignment:

There are approximately 250 students enrolled in a creative writing course. At the beginning of the semester, students set up a page on a social networking site and use this to publish short assignments for lecturers and other students to see throughout the semester. Students are required to review their peers' work: each week students must comment on three other students' work. 10% of the subject mark is allocated to this peer review process. Students are told at the beginning of the semester what is expected in this peer review: they are given a list of vocabulary that could be used and are told to focus on making their feedback constructive and helpful. Usually the peer review works well but it must be monitored.

Scenario:

Michael does not really want to do the peer review part of the assignment but has to because it is compulsory. He likes being able to see other students' work but can't always think of something to say about the work other than "I like this" or "I don't like it." As the semester goes on he is increasingly annoyed about having to write comments on other students' work. He also becomes increasingly bold with his comments, using words like "boring," "dull" and "unimaginative" to describe his peers' writing. He knows he is supposed to provide constructive criticism and tries to offer suggestions about how people could improve their work. He is surprised when he sees the lecturer has contradicted his comments on one student's page.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 3 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

In a beginner's language course, students attend some classes in a computer lab, where they complete tasks in a virtual world environment. The purpose of these tasks is to familiarise students with the names of food common throughout Japan and with main ingredients of dishes (and associated vocabulary); to practice and consolidate vocabulary and phrases on ordering food learned from a lesson in their textbook; and to practice ordering food in a restaurant in Japan. Students were asked to go to a market in the virtual world, collect information about the ingredients and order the food in Japanese. In class, students were allocated to teams, with five students in each team. Each student worked on an individual computer. Although they were all in the same lab class they were not physically grouped together and did not necessarily know which other students were in their group. They were given challenges such as 'someone in the group is vegetarian, Muslim', and they had to create specific dishes for different people. Getting to the point of having the food on table was a joint effort, and so the successful achievement of the aim was dependent on the successful operation of the group.

Scenario:

When, for one reason or another, the group did not function optimally and the dishes were not all in place by the end of the lesson, some students complained that the assignment was not equitable to everyone.

The lecturer's solution was to go back to the logs generated by the virtual world to see what the student groups were planning to order. He explained this to them subsequent to the class and said he would ensure there would be equity and they would be graded on how far they had understood what to do.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 3 (Student)

About the assignment:

In a beginner's language course, students attend some classes in a computer lab, where they complete tasks in a virtual world environment. The purpose of these tasks is to familiarise students with the names of food common throughout Japan and with main ingredients of dishes (and associated vocabulary); to practice and consolidate vocabulary and phrases on ordering food learned from a lesson in their textbook; and to practice ordering food in a restaurant in Japan. Students were asked to go to a market in the virtual world, collect information about the ingredients and order the food in Japanese. In class, students were allocated to teams, with five students in each team. Each student worked on an individual computer. Although they were all in the same lab class they were not physically grouped together and did not necessarily know which other students were in their group. They were given challenges such as 'someone in the group is vegetarian, Muslim', and they had to create specific dishes for different people. Getting to the point of having the food on table was a joint effort, and so the successful achievement of the aim was dependent on the successful operation of the group.

Scenario:

John enjoyed doing this activity: it was fun and provided a 'real world' setting in which to practice his language skills. However, he found the task quite difficult and was confused about how it was assessed. He understood that members of the group got marks for successfully completing each task, but he was not entirely sure how the marks were allocated or distributed. The students in his group found the technology quite difficult to use and spent much of the lesson time navigating the virtual world, getting lost, and trying to work out what they were meant to be doing. The lab classes were noisy and chaotic, with all students trying to do this activity – and calling for help – at the same time. The lecturer was there and offered help but could not help everyone at once, or equally. John felt his group was disadvantaged because they couldn't complete one of the tasks in time but may have been able to if they had received help. While John enjoyed this activity he would have preferred it if it had not been assessed.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 4 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

Over 400 students in a beginner's language course used a social networking tool to write and publish weekly blog posts in order to practice their language skills. The assignment was introduced in the middle of first semester and students had more than a month to complete it. It aimed to provide motivation and skill development by requiring students to post a personal profile and blog at least three times in response to other students – all in Spanish. They were then required to select their best three blogs and submit these with their profile (including any photos) as hard copy. Feedback is regarded as vital in second language learning and one of the aims of the exercise was that students would receive comments from staff on at least three of their blogs.

Scenario:

While staff were supposed to provide informal feedback on student blogs, this didn't always happen. In addition to the two full-time staff managing this assignment, there were approximately six sessional staff involved on different campuses and there was differential interaction with the students' work: some of the staff did not feel committed to the exercise. Moreover, at the University, with the new EB Agreement, sessional staff were expected to take 1 hr to mark 5,000 words of assignments, but 'informal feedback' was now to be considered 'part of teaching' and therefore not paid.

The full-time lecturers engaged in a number of ongoing briefing meetings with the sessional staff, but decided to address the students' problem by spending time in lectures giving generalised feedback on the basis of their cumulative experience with the blogs.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 4 (Student)

About the assignment:

Over 400 students in a beginner's language course used a social networking tool to write and publish weekly blog posts in order to practice their language skills. The assignment was introduced in the middle of first semester and students had more than a month to complete it. It aimed to provide motivation and skill development by requiring students to post a personal profile and blog at least three times in response to other students – all in Spanish. They were then required to select their best three blogs and submit these with their profile (including any photos) as hard copy. Feedback is regarded as vital in second language learning and one of the aims of the exercise was that students would receive comments from staff on at least three of their blogs.

Scenario:

Jane followed the instructions to set up her account and profile on the social networking site. She found the site easy to use and the lecturers had provided detailed instructions on how to use it. However, she found it difficult to maintain the weekly blog because she did not feel she had sufficient vocabulary to write regularly and informally in Spanish. She was very disappointed that she did not receive any feedback from tutors or lecturers on her blog. She received a mark for her assignment but did not know the reasons that mark was given and did not receive any information about whether her use of language was correct or how it could be improved. The assignment was due before the exam and she would have liked to have received more feedback about her writing and vocabulary in order to prepare for the exam.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 5 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

Students in an advanced computing class of 15 students are required to use specialised software for their programming assignments and class exercises. As is the case with much state-of-the-art software, it is poorly documented and there are no text books and few other support materials. With this in mind the students were required to work collaboratively to produce a user manual for this software. The user manual was in the form of a wiki and was to be developed over the course of the semester. The intention was for this resource to be used by the students in this unit and subsequent units. A key aim underlying this exercise was to engage the students in the learning process as they endeavoured to understand the software and then formulate their explanations on the wiki.

Scenario:

This was the first time the lecturer had set an assignment of this nature so he was uncertain as to how the students would respond to this task. At the beginning of the semester the students were told what they were required to produce. It was explained that they were expected to build the manual over the course of the semester and this was to be a collaborative process. As these were advanced level computing students it was not considered necessary to give any instruction in how to use the wiki per se.

The lecturer monitored the progress of the wiki once or twice a week. For the first month he noticed a steady growth in contributions. However, upon closer investigation, he found most contributions were coming from one student and more than half the class had not yet contributed. Several times during the semester he reminded the students that this was an assessible task and worth 10% of their final mark. At the end of the semester 25 % of the students had made no contributions.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 5 (Students)

About the assignment:

Students in an advanced computing class of 15 students are required to use specialised software for their programming assignments and class exercises. As is the case with much state-of-the-art software, it is poorly documented and there are no text books and few other support materials. With this in mind the students were required to work collaboratively to produce a user manual for this software. The user manual was in the form of a wiki and was to be developed over the course of the semester. The intention was for this resource to be used by the students in this unit and subsequent units. A key aim underlying this exercise was to engage the students in the learning process as they endeavoured to understand the software and then formulate their explanations on the wiki.

Scenario:

Kim enjoyed computing and had taught herself several programming languages. She had a clear idea about how an instruction manual should be structured and so put up an outline on the wiki soon after the assignmnet was announced. As the unit progressed she visited the wiki regularly and added bits of information she had discovered as she explored the software. She was pleased with the way it took shape and happy that others seemed to appreciate her efforts, as evidenced by the fact that the outline remained unchanged and no modification were made to her contibutions. At the end of semester she was pleased to receive 10% for the assignment, although she felt she deserved bonus marks for her contribution to the class, as she knew most others had done very little.

Chris didn't look at the wiki until three weeks into the semester. On his first visit he was surprised at how much content there was. He investigated the different topics but could not immediately see where he could contribute. He decided that he would look again later. Some stage near the end of the semester he posted a substantial contribution to a topic which took several hours work. At the end of semester he was disappointed to receive 1% for the assignment. It was explained that he had only made 1 contribution in contrast to a several of his classmates who had made over 20 contributions.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 6 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

Postgraduate students undertaking a media and communications course worked in small groups (4-5 students per group) on a collaborative assignment that ran for several weeks over the course of the semester. The assignment involved tracking and analysing how a significant news item had been reported in various sources over a period of time. Each group was given a specific issue and they were required to examine how that issue had been reported in the media. Students used a wiki tool that was embedded in the university's LMS to present their analyses, including images and links to the news sources. Each group had their own wiki space in which to complete their assignment. The wikis were private to each student group until the assignment had been completed, at which point the wikis were locked from further editing. Students were then asked to spend two weeks reviewing another group's wiki content. At this stage the completed wikis were made open for all students to see. All students in each group were given the same marks: 15% marked by the lecturer (based on an 'executive summary' of the wiki), and 10% marked by other students (based on the average mark received during the peer review process).

Scenario:

This was the first time this assignment had been run and, overall, the lecturer was pleased with how it went although there were some things he would like to do differently next time. There were technical issues that inhibited how students could use the wiki, so the lecturer had to reassure students that they would not be penalised if they were unable to include some information (e.g., upload videos) because the wiki had not worked as planned. The lecturer was also concerned about whether the peer review component had worked as planned. As it was the first time he had used a Web 2.0 tool in an assignment, he was concerned about copying, and had designed the assignment so that students could not see each other's work until the work was completed. However, this meant that groups could not make use of any feedback they received during the peer review process to improve their assignments. It also meant that any cooperative learning that might have occurred between groups had been inhibited. The lecturer was considering running the assignment again in future classes, but changing the peer review component so that it occurred earlier in the assignment.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 6 (Student)

About the assignment:

Postgraduate students undertaking a media and communications course worked in small groups (4-5 students per group) on a collaborative assignment that ran for several weeks over the course of the semester. The assignment involved tracking and analysing how a significant news item had been reported in various sources over a period of time. Each group was given a specific issue and they were required to examine how that issue had been reported in the media. Students used a wiki tool that was embedded in the university's LMS to present their analyses, including images and links to the news sources. Each group had their own wiki space in which to complete their assignment. The wikis were private to each student group until the assignment had been completed, at which point the wikis were locked from further editing. Students were then asked to spend two weeks reviewing another group's wiki content. At this stage the completed wikis were made open for all students to see. All students in each group were given the same marks: 15% marked by the lecturer (based on an 'executive summary' of the wiki), and 10% marked by other students (based on the average mark received during the peer review process).

Scenario:

Graham and the other students in his group put a lot of work into their assignment. Graham was pleased that only his group could see the wiki they were working on because he did not want other students to copy the way his group had created the wiki. He realised that, even if their work was visible, other groups could not copy the content they'd created, because each group was working on a different issue, but he was concerned that people might copy some of his group's ideas. When it came time to do the peer review and Graham was able to see everyone else's wiki, he realised that other students had also put a lot of effort into their wikis. It was a good learning experience reading other people's wikis and seeing how they had done things differently. After doing the peer review Graham would have liked to have been able to do further editing on his group's wiki to improve some of the content and structure in line with the way other people had approached the task. He also found that the feedback they received from the peer review was minimal and not particularly helpful when they were no longer able to work on the assignment.

Workshop Activity

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 7 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

Masters students enrolled in an urban design course were undertaking a major design assignment throughout the semester. At the same time they were asked to complete a reflective blog, which was shared with lecturers and other students on the course. Although the design project was the major assessment for the unit, the blog was also assessed (20%). Students were told to use the blog to post weekly reflections about their progress, to record and discuss any difficulties they had encountered and to describe how they overcame them. The blogs were meant to show evidence of students' ability to critically reflect on their own learning and experiences. Because of the personal and individual nature of these blogs, the assessment criteria were left fairly open.

Scenario:

When designing this assignment, the lecturer felt it was important to have fairly 'loose' assessment criteria, so that students had some autonomy in the way they approached the assignment. Students were encouraged to use their blogs for personal reflection, as a tool for recording their 'personal learning journey'. However, at the end of semester the lecturer and tutors found it quite difficult to assess the blogs because of both the open criteria and the personal nature of the assignment. In team meetings, tutors and lecturers had difficulty agreeing on the assessment standards for some of the students' work. The lecturer discussed the problem with colleagues and found they had varying opinions about how to approach it. One colleague in particular felt strongly that this sort of personal reflection should not be assessed at all, remarking "How do you assess how someone feels about their learning journey?"

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 7 (Student)

About the assignment:

Masters students enrolled in an urban design course were undertaking a major design assignment throughout the semester. At the same time they were asked to complete a reflective blog, which was shared with lecturers and other students on the course. Although the design project was the major assessment for the unit, the blog was also assessed (20%). Students were told to use the blog to post weekly reflections about their progress, to record and discuss any difficulties they had encountered and to describe how they overcame them. The blogs were meant to show evidence of students' ability to critically reflect on their own learning and experiences. Because of the personal and individual nature of these blogs, the assessment criteria were left fairly open.

Scenario:

Emma wasn't sure really sure how to approach the blog assignment when she first started. She asked her tutor for advice but was told: "Anything goes ... it's entirely up to you how you use it." At first she was cautious when writing the blog, as she was worried about what other students and lecturers might think when they read it. She didn't want to appear 'weak' when writing about the mistakes she'd made and difficulties she had encountered. As time went on she realised all the student blogs were fairly personal and reflective and she felt more comfortable presenting herself in this way. However, she was concerned about the tutor's opinion of her, based on some comments he had made in class. The tutor seemed to have made a judgement about her based on the blog. She was worried that the tutor's opinion about her personal writing would influence the mark she received – for both the blog and the design assignment.

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 8 (Lecturer)

About the assignment:

In a part-time postgraduate education course, students were asked to try out different Web 2.0 tools and then reflect on how these might be used in their profession. The assignment ran for six weeks and was worth 30% of students' marks. This was a collaborative assignment. Students worked in small groups to create a wiki in which they reported on what they had found out about the different tools available. Each wiki was private to the student group, although the lecturers could also see it. In order to complete this assignment, students needed to sign on to a number of freely available Web 2.0 tools, such as Facebook, blogger, Flickr, Twitter, and social bookmarking tools (e.g., Delicious), and practice using them as trainee teachers. In the assignment guidelines, students were told that if they already used these tools in their personal life they could reflect on how they had used it in the past and what other possibilities/limitations the tools offered in an educational context. Students were marked individually, based on their contributions to the group wiki.

Scenario:

Two lecturers ran this course and marked the wikis. They were impressed with the quality of students' work. Students had tried out a range of tools and each group had provided insightful comments about how the tools might be used. However, one lecturer had reservations about the assignment because it required students to sign on and use publicly available tools that meant students had to create several online profiles. She felt that there were issues of privacy that weren't adequately addressed in the assignment guidelines. She had had some discussions with students in her class who had expressed reservations about using personal tools for university coursework. She was concerned that it was not appropriate to ask students to create a "digital footprint" as part of a university assignment, and felt strongly that students should be educated about how they present themselves online before undertaking an assignment like this.

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?

Scenario 8 (Student)

About the assignment:

In a part-time postgraduate education course, students were asked to try out different Web 2.0 tools and then reflect on how these might be used in their profession. The assignment ran for six weeks and was worth 30% of students' marks. This was a collaborative assignment. Students worked in small groups to create a wiki in which they reported on what they had found out about the different tools available. Each wiki was private to the student group, although the lecturers could also see it. In order to complete this assignment, students needed to sign on to a number of freely available Web 2.0 tools, such as Facebook, blogger, Flickr, Twitter, and social bookmarking tools (e.g., Delicious), and use them as trainee teachers. In the assignment guidelines, students were told that if they already used these tools in their personal life they could reflect on how they had used it in the past and what other possibilities/limitations the tools offered in a professional context. Students were marked individually, based on their contributions to the group wiki.

Scenario:

A group of students were talking about this assignment in class one day. They discussed how they felt about having to sign on to public tools as part of a university assignment. All agreed it was a nuisance to have to create so many new user accounts and profiles. But some students were more concerned about the public image they were creating when using these tools for the purposes of a university assignment. One student said that she performed in a band on weekends and used the web to promote her music. She didn't want people searching for her music to come across her university coursework. She said "I don't want my name to come up too often in Google searches". Another student said he used Twitter a lot in his personal life to communicate with his friends. He didn't want to report on his personal use of Twitter in the assignment wiki so he chose to set up a new Twitter account for this assignment. These students were worried that because they had been cautious in the way they had used Web 2.0 tools in the assignment, they may have got a lower mark than other students who were more adventurous.

Discuss with your partner/group the following questions:

- What do you think of the outcome of this scenario?
- In this scenario what do you think are the most constructive features of assessment? What do you think are the most questionable features?
- What do you think could have been done differently to improve assessment practices in this scenario?